



steppen

ed brubaker
sean phillips

#10
DEC



SUGGESTED FOR
MATURE READERS

Sean
2003

WILDSTORM.COM

Ten seconds after the world falls to pieces, a lot of things become clear to me.



HOLDEN!

COME ON!
COME ON!

I'VE GOT YOU...



I see through all the betrayals and hidden agendas. I see through the things I've been forced to do.

And I see what matters.



And I know what I have to do next.



BULLETPROOF

Of course, I'd known for two days that Miss Misery was in love with me.



Not that she said anything. In fact, she'd been more distant than ever the past few months.



No, I knew because I woke up in the middle of the night to find her throwing up in my bathroom.

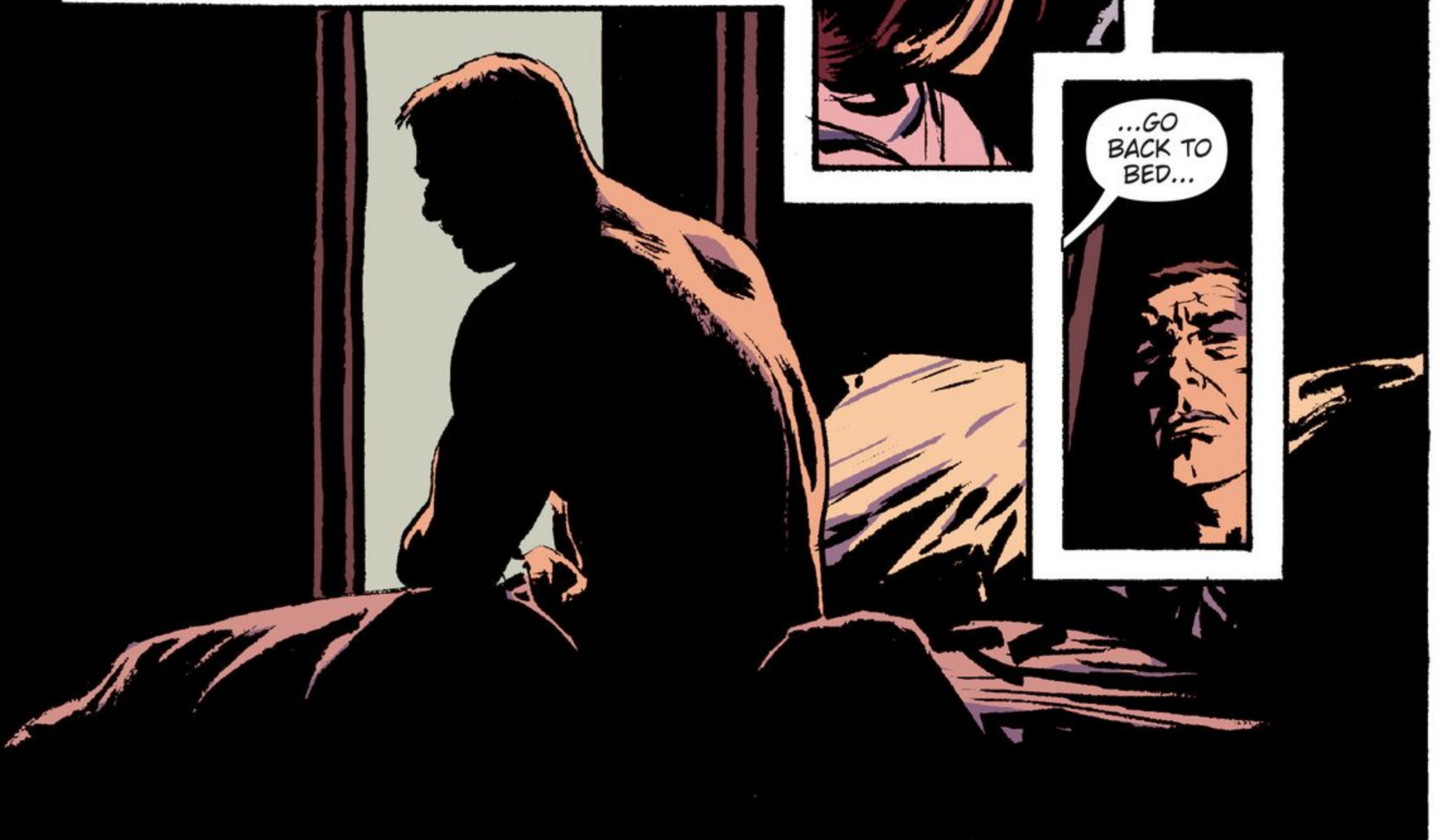


I was making her sick, which meant in her mind, what we had was no longer wrong.



How long had she been hiding this from me?





I waited up a long time, but she didn't come to bed, or if she did, it was long after I'd drifted off again.

And needless to say, we didn't talk about it the next day when I saw her...

I ASSUME YOU BOTH REMEMBER HER GRACE, DIAMANDA M'BATU, THE LOVELY AND CHARMING RULER OF EGYPT AND AT ONE TIME THE **GREATER** MAJORITY OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT?



OF COURSE, A **PLEASURE**, YOUR GRACE.

AN HONOR...



WHERE IS THE **OTHER** ONE, TAO? THE **BALD** MAN?

YOU SAID I WOULD GET YOUR **THREE BEST**.



AS IT TURNS OUT, PETER IS **UNAVAILABLE** AT THE PRESENT TIME, MY DEAR.

BUT YOU WILL INDEED HAVE **THREE OF** MY BEST, WHICH WERE MY **EXACT** WORDS.

EVERYTHING MUST ALWAYS BE A **GAME** WITH YOU, TAO.

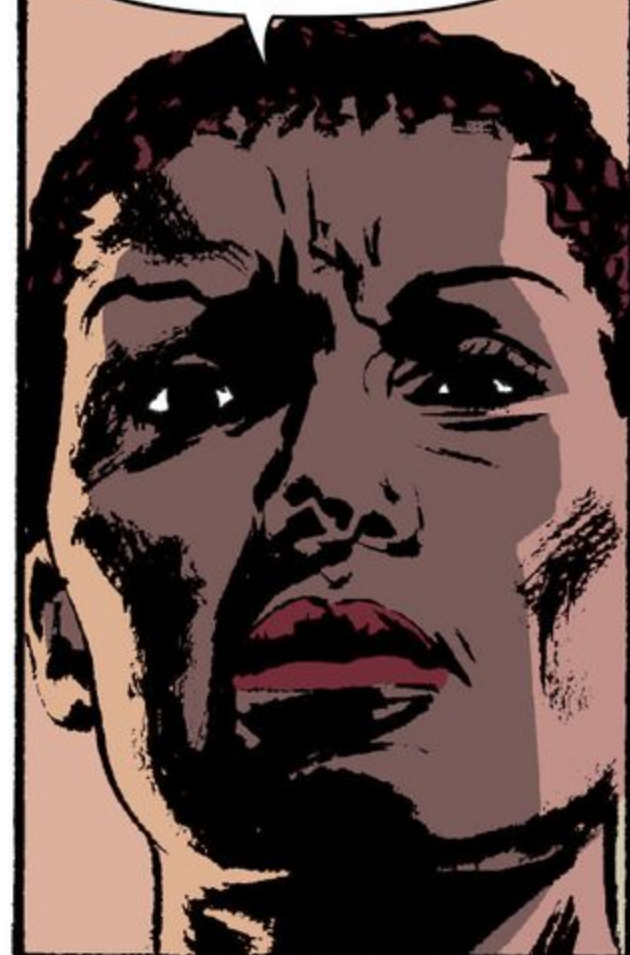


BUT I AM NOT INTERESTED IN YOUR GAMES ANY LONGER, OR YOUR CLEVER TONGUE...

REGARDLESS OF ITS **MANY** USES.



I AM HERE BECAUSE YOU **PROMISED** ME THINGS YOU **DID NOT** DELIVER, SO YOUR DEBT MUST BE PAID IN ANOTHER WAY.



AND I MEAN TO ACCOMMODATE, BELIEVE ME. NOW, SHOULD WE GET TO THE TASK AT HAND?

I'M *SURE* YOU HAVE BETTER PLACES TO BE.

YOU'RE SURE OF *MANY THINGS*, I'VE ALWAYS FOUND, TAO...

WHAT IS THE JOB, SIR?

A *RETRIEVAL*, FOR THE MOST PART, ISN'T THAT *RIGHT*, MY DEAR?

YES, BUT NOT A SIMPLE ONE, BY ANY MEANS.

SOMETHING VALUABLE TO ME WAS STOLEN BY ONE OF MY ENEMIES, AND WITHOUT IT, I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO COMPLETE A CERTAIN *RITUAL*...

AND IF I DO NOT COMPLETE THE RITUAL, I MAY *LOSE* WHAT LITTLE POWER I YET RETAIN.

ARE WE ALLOWED TO KNOW WHAT THIS ITEM IS?

THE STAFF OF *CLEOPATRA*, MY ANCESTOR.

OUR INFORMATION PLACES THE STAFF IN A SECURE HOLDING FACILITY JUST SOUTH OF WASHINGTON D.C.

YURI KASOKOV WILL ARRIVE FROM MOSCOW TO PICK IT UP *PERSONALLY* THIS WEEKEND.

SONY





YOU'RE SHITTING
ME? SHE **ACTUALLY**
SAID THAT TO TAO?

YEAH, HE
CHUCKLED
AFTER SHE LEFT
THE ROOM.

SO, HOW
RESPONSIBLE
IS HE FOR HER
TROUBLES,
THEN?

I'M
GUESSING
ENTIRELY.

I CAN'T REALLY
SAY. CLASSIFIED
INTEL AND ALL
THAT SHIT.

HIS HANDS
CERTAINLY
AREN'T CLEAN,
THOUGH.

YOU CAN'T
FUCKING
TELL ME?

YOU
COCKSUCKER.

THERE'S A LOT OF
SHIT I CAN'T TELL
YOU, GENOCIDE...

THAT'S
JUST THE WAY
IT IS.

YEAH YEAH...
WHATEVER.
SO, WHERE'S
GRIMM? WHY CAN'T
HE TAG ALONG ON
THIS JOB INSTEAD
OF ME?

AA, HE'S STILL FOLLOWING UP ON SOME BULLSHIT ABOUT THAT JOB HE AND I WORKED LAST MONTH.

TRYING TO FIGURE OUT IF THE OTHER SIDE FOUND WHAT WE DIDN'T.

JESUS, WHAT A WASTE OF TIME.

I KNOW. MISS MISERY DOESN'T EVEN THINK THERE WAS A MOLE.

YOU HAVEN'T MENTIONED HER LATELY, YOU TWO STILL BANGING?

I'M NOT SURE.

WHAT THE FUCK IS *THAT* SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

NOTHING. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT...

WE SHOULD GET ON THE *ROAD* ANYWAY...GOT TO BE IN D.C. IN A FEW HOURS.

HEY, IT'S NOT SO MUCH FUN BEING YOUR FRIEND IF YOU KEEP YOUR WHOLE GOD-DAMN LIFE A *SECRET*, MOTHERFUCKER...

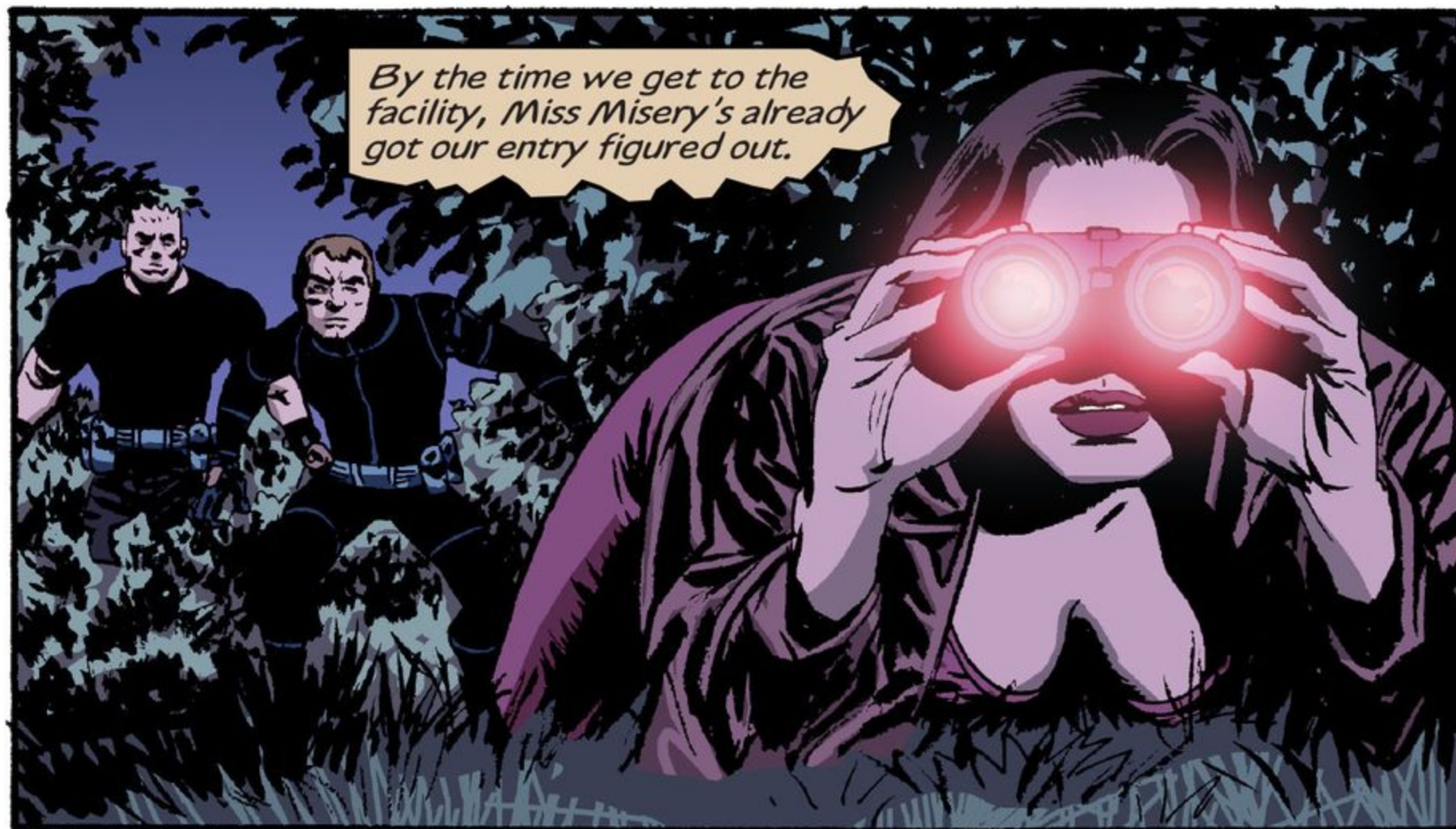
JESUS CHRIST, ARE YOU *WHINING*?

IS THAT THE *INFAMOUS* GENOCIDE JONES WHINING LIKE A LITTLE GIRL?

DUDE, DO *NOT* MAKE ME HURT YOU...

OH, NOW I'M SCARED..

SHIT, YOU FUCKIN' *BETTER* BE..



By the time we get to the facility, Miss Misery's already got our entry figured out.



And of course, she picks the way in that brings us in contact with the guards.

She needs the violence, the death, to put herself right again.

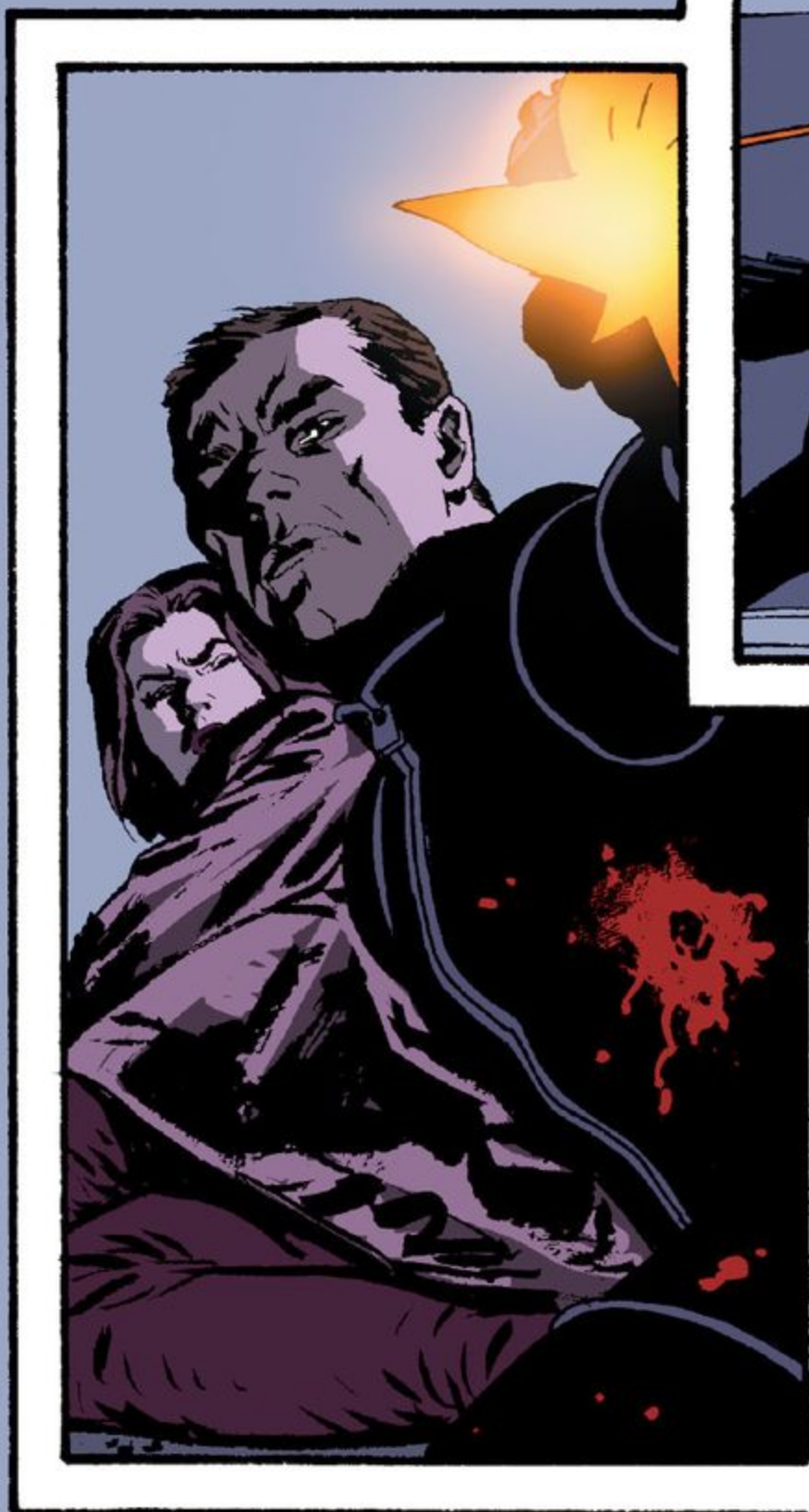




*I have a hard
time holding it
against her.*









SHIT!

THE SECURITY
OVERRIDE CODE
DOESN'T WORK.
THEY MUST'VE
CHANGED IT.

SO MUCH
FOR THEM
TRUSTING TAO,
huhh?

SO,
WHAT DO
WE DO?



THERE'S A MANUAL
RELEASE IN THE ROOM
WHERE ALL THOSE SOLDIERS
CAME FROM.

I'LL
GO.



I'LL
COME WITH
YOU.

NO.

YOU TWO
STAY *HERE*, WATCH
THAT DOOR. WE DON'T
KNOW HOW MANY OF
THEM ARE INSIDE.



YOU WANNA TELL ME
WHAT THE HELL *THAT*
WAS ABOUT?

NOT
REALLY...



SO WHAT, WE JUST STAND
HERE WITH OUR *DICKS* IN
OUR HANDS WAITING
FOR HER?





TELL IT, MAN.

HOW THE HELL DID YOU GET TO BE SO BULLETPROOF?



ALL RIGHT, FINE...

BUT I AIN'T THAT GOOD AT THIS FUCKIN' GAME, SO IF I SLIP OUT OF *THIRD PERSON*, DON'T BUST MY FUCKIN' BALLS ABOUT IT..

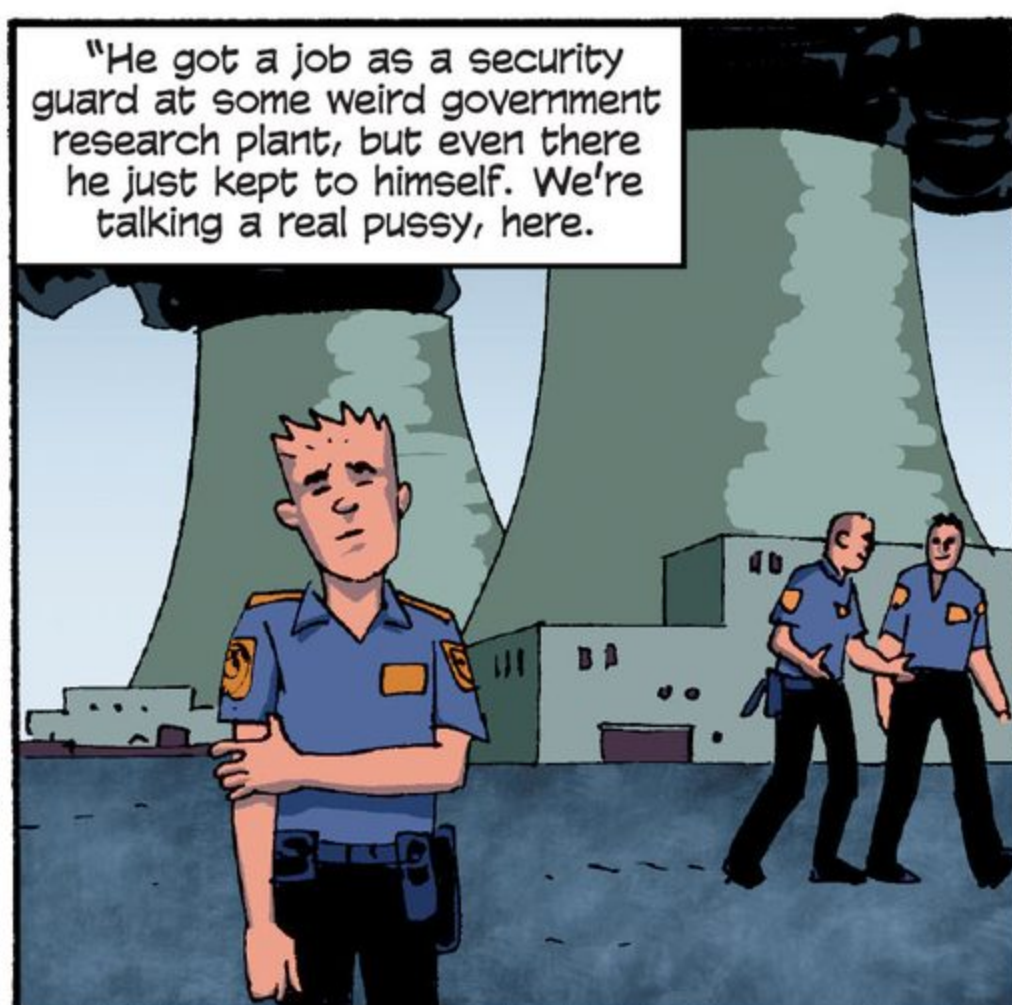
"Okay, so there's this guy, a skinny little jerk named Byron Jones. A bigger putz would've been harder to find, seriously.



"Byron was so afraid of the world that he married the first girl he slept with, right out of high school, so by the time he was twenty-two, he was married and had a kid.



"He got a job as a security guard at some weird government research plant, but even there he just kept to himself. We're talking a real pussy, here.



"So, he and his family lived in this trailer park, because they couldn't afford any better, and everyday Byron worked his shit job and came home to the shit-hole where he lived.



"He had learned to live with the disappointment in his wife's eyes, because life was nothing but an endless series of disappointments..."



"...Except when he was with his son, Matt. That kid was so happy in spite of it all, that it just warmed Byron's heart."



"And loving that kid so much made him afraid, too. Afraid for his future, afraid of the world around them. Afraid his son would grow up to be just as scared as him."



"So in this trailer park there was this asshole couple who had some kind of dog bred for fighting. A Doberman/Pitbull combination or something like that."



"And this dog was always getting loose and scaring all the kids."



"Byron had tried to talk to the owners about it, but they just chased him off and laughed at him."



"So, he complained to the police, but they didn't do anything.

"For the last few months he was calling in a complaint every week, but those bastards never even sent out a patrol car.



"So, Byron was just shit out of luck, and too much of a coward to do anything about it.



"But there was something else. Being a loner, I ate lunch at the plant on my own.



"And even though I--I mean, he was too stupid to see it, this room was changing him. He was getting stronger, and bigger.



"So, one day Byron comes home from work early, and he sees that the dog has broken its chain again...and he just...he...



"...knew it was going to be a bad scene, because...because I didn't hear any barking. Why wasn't that fuckin' thing barking?



"...And then I saw it.

"It had mauled my son. Ripped him open, and was chewing on his insides like a can of Alpo.



"I don't even think I realized it wasn't hurting me when its teeth broke around my arm. It couldn't penetrate my skin.

"It just hung on there, and wouldn't let go. So I strangled it.



"After I killed the dog, I put my wife through the wall, too. She was sitting inside drunk while Matt was being ripped apart. She didn't deserve another breath.



"Then I went and punched that fucking biker neighbor in the face over and over again. Until there was no face left to hit, just brains and carpet.



"The police were waiting outside when I finished with his girlfriend.

"I could never get them to come out for my complaints, but here they were now.





"And when they saw me covered in blood and brains, they didn't bother to try to take me alive.



"But their fuckin' bullets didn't hurt me. They just bounced off.



"Some of them ran away when they saw that. I killed the rest.



"And I drove off in one of their cars, and Byron Jones died with his family, you know...



...BECAUSE HE NEVER REALLY LIVED ANYWAY, DID HE?

AND THAT'S THE STORY.



JESUS...

I CAN'T... I MEAN, JESUS FUCKING CHRIST, GENOCIDE...



Ah, IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO, HOLDEN, DON'T SWEAT IT.



YOU'LL HAVE TO TELL ME YOURS SOMEDAY.

YEAH...YOU WOULDN'T LIKE IT MUCH...PROBABLY.



AH, I LOVE A TRAGEDY.

ALL RIGHT, YOU TWO...



I COULDN'T FIND THE MANUAL RELEASE, SO I BEAT THE NEW CODE OUT OF A GUARD THAT WAS HIDING BACK THERE.

LET'S GO.



ACCORDING TO MY CALCULATIONS, WE'VE GOT ABOUT EIGHT MINUTES UNTIL THE FBI NOTICES A SECURITY BREACH OUT HERE AND SENDS SOMEONE.

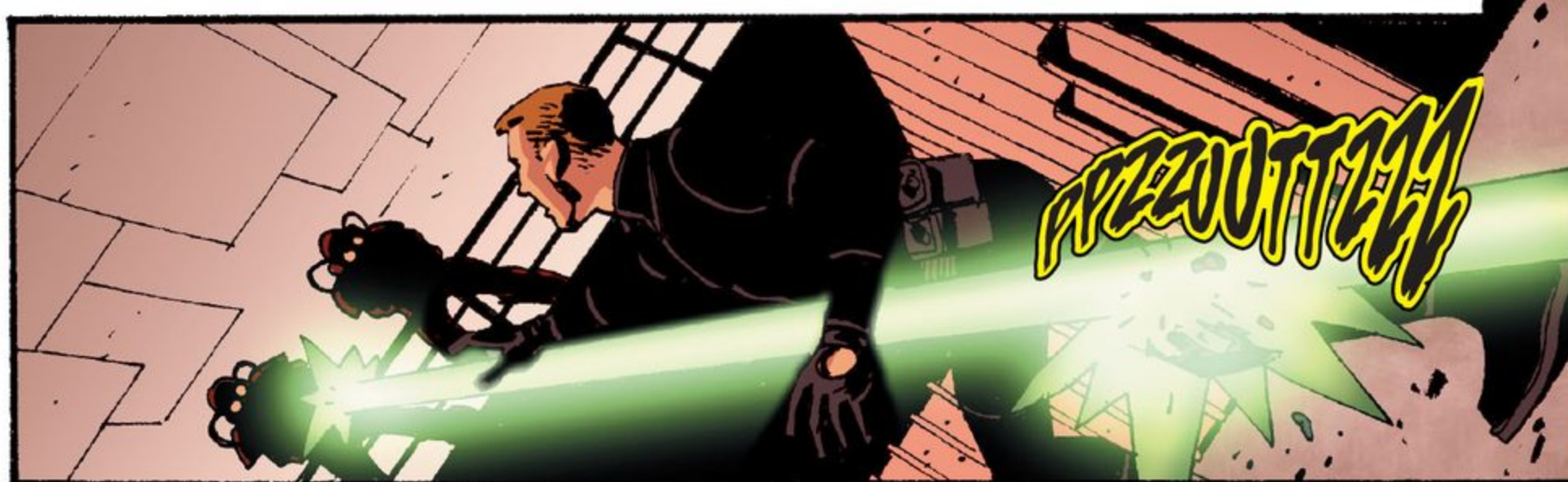
I WANT TO BE **LONG GONE** BY THEN.

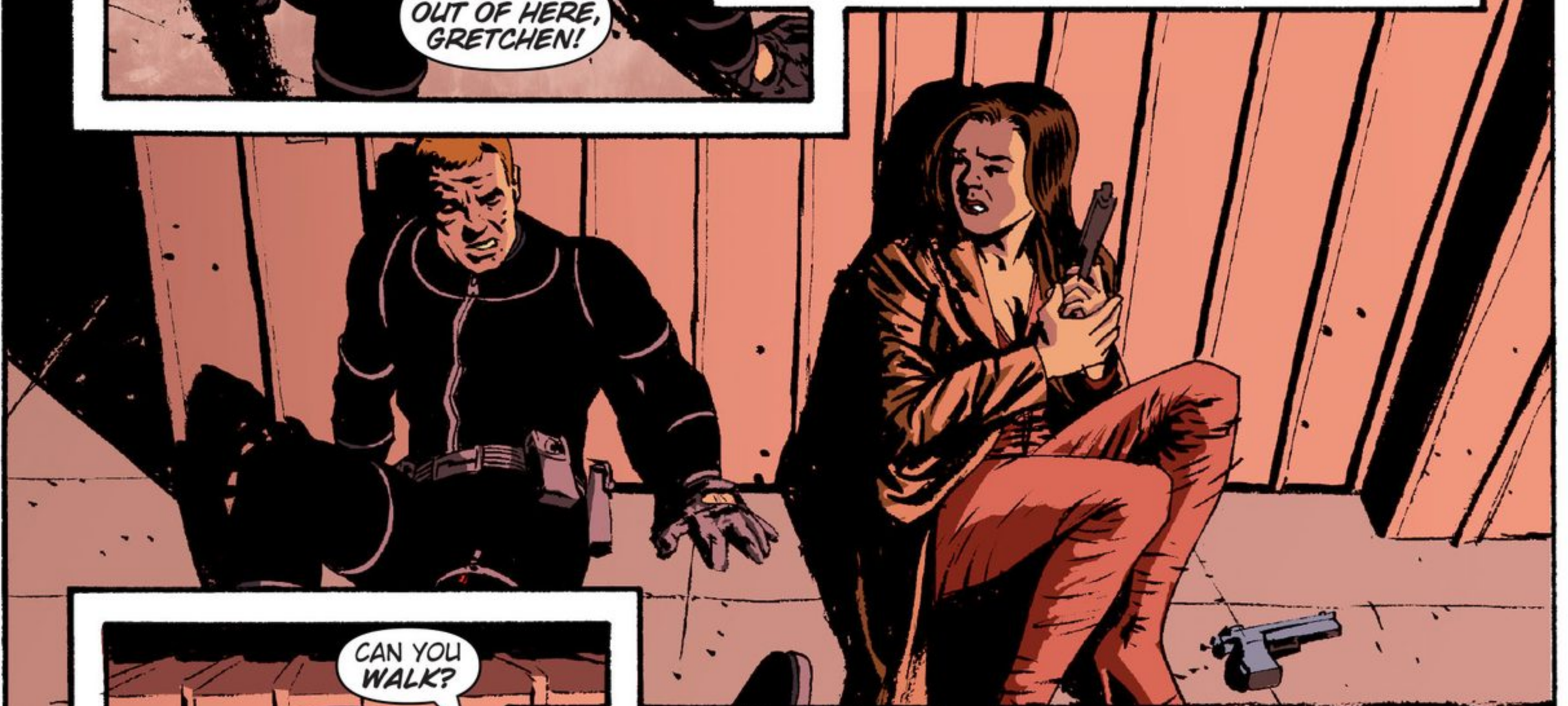
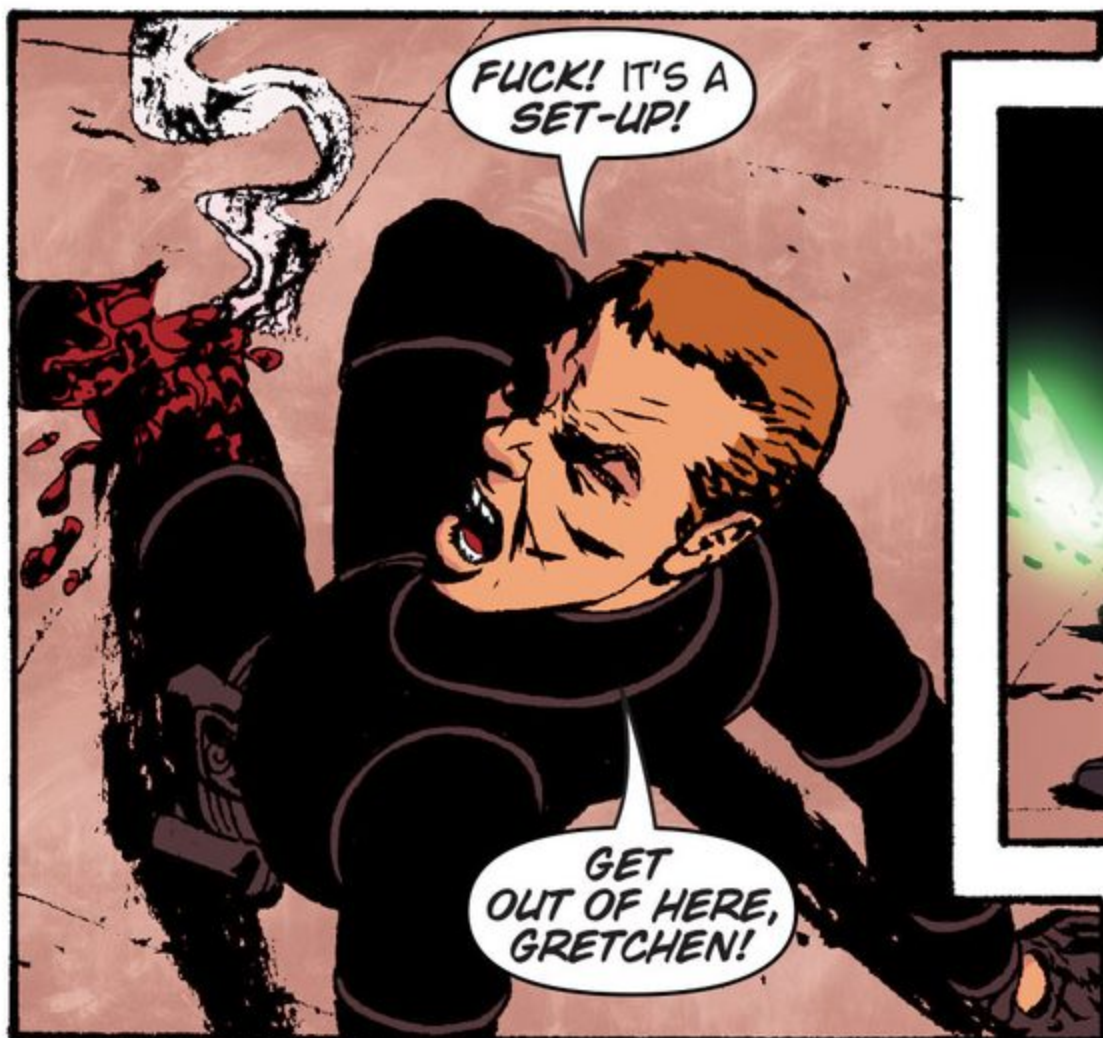


YEAH, YEAH, YOU AND ME **BOTH**, SISTER...



HEY, WHAT THE **FUCK**...?







The knee is one of the most painful places to get hurt on the human body. It doesn't hurt me, but I know it's painful.



I'M SORRY, GRETCHEN, I CAN'T LOSE YOU, TOO...



WHAT--

AHHHHH!



FBI!

FREEZE MOTHER-FUCKER!



DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT MOVING!

